

# Should the elderly receive free bus rides?

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During times of economic hardship and enforced frugality it seems to some people that taxpayers' money is being squandered when the elderly receive free bus rides.

Advocates for free bus rides state that it allows the elderly to remain active physically as well as mentally, delaying the onset of a whole host of diseases and mental disorders, including dementia and Alzheimer's, depression and heart disease, high blood pressure and balance problems. Critics argue that free bus rides for the elderly merely add to the burden of an already debt-ridden society. Free bus rides for the elderly actually save large amounts of tax payers' money. Active elderly people stay healthier – both physically and mentally – for far longer than inactive retired people. This is a scientifically proven fact.

If providing free bus rides means encouraging the elderly, who are often on a very tight household budget, to get out of the house, socialize and take regular exercise, then the long-run will show that this is not a waste of tax payers' money. Elderly people who lead active lives need far less doctor's home visits or medicines for a variety of illnesses. They need less home carers. To be able to get on a bus means coming out of isolation, for many elderly people live alone. Isolation causes feelings of depression and brings on other mental disorders that will eventually cause rapid decline and hospitalization. The daily walk to the bus stop counts towards the minimum exercise needed to keep older human beings healthy.

The social contact, such as speaking to the driver or fellow passengers, helps to keep minds active and focused. Mobile elderly people can still be useful

members of society, perhaps work as volunteers, saving salary expenses in various social work sectors. According to the British National Health Service's advice website, being inactive can be very risky for the elderly. They soon lose the ability and confidence to do things on their own. They develop chronic conditions such as heart disease, arthritis, diabetes, difficulty walking or balance problems, simply because they do not exercise, neither minds nor bodies.

**Conclusion**A walk to the bus stop may only be short, but if it leads to a bus ride to the nearest community hall for a tea dance and a chat, then the fact the elderly didn't have to pay for that bus ride means they can still regard themselves as an active member of society, despite their straightened financial means. Long-term care for the elderly is extremely expensive. The aim should therefore be to delay the onset of typical "ageing" illnesses and disorders for as long as possible. **Summary**Remaining active after taking retirement can help to manage stress levels, improve moods, reduce feelings of depression and prevent series of chronic conditions and stroke. Activity, so many studies suggest, is also important for maintaining cognitive functions, such as our ability to plan an activity, ignore irrelevant information sent to our brains, long and short-term memory and to shift rapidly between tasks. This "anti-ageing medication" is available for the price of a simple bus ticket! Sources: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/exerciseforolderadults/healthbenefits/01.html><http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/activities-for-the-elderly.aspx>

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